

**BEFORE THE
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
WASHINGTON, D.C.**

**REPORTING THE CAUSES OF AIRLINE DELAYS
AND CANCELLATIONS**

Notice of Proposed Rulemaking

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Docket OST 2000-8164

**COMMENTS OF THE
AMERICAN SOCIETY OF TRAVEL AGENTS, INC.**

The American Society of Travel Agents, Inc. ("ASTA") submits these comments in response to the captioned Notice.

ASTA was a member of the Air Carrier On-Time Reporting Advisory Committee (the "Task Force"). We believe that the proposed rule is a valuable first step in removing the cloud of public suspicion and concern that surrounds the issue of flight delays and their real causes. The problem is large and cannot be resolved in one step. Overall we support adoption of the rule.

Our only quarrel with the rulemaking lies not in the rule but in the notice, where DOT observes "one of our aims in developing the causal reporting system is to require minimal change to the air carriers' internal tracking systems." While we share the view that government regulation in this and other areas should be a minimally intrusive as possible, we do not accept the implication that flight delay reporting must be largely limited by whatever the carriers are doing today to collect information for their own purposes. The public interest in knowing what causes delays must

supercede airline interests in avoiding collection of data they themselves may not use.

Beyond the four corners of this rulemaking, there is another issue that was largely set aside when the Task Force met but which eventually must be addressed. It will be an even bigger issue when traffic returns to pre-September 11 “normal” levels in the presence of a new and complex system of security that, from time to time, as currently managed, leads to massive delays from airports in which security “breaches” have occurred. The issue is: how will the airlines communicate in a meaningful and timely way to affected passengers the reasons for particular flight delays. The “voluntary commitments” extracted from the airlines over the past few years led to little more than promises to do more on a “best efforts” basis on an issue that is likely the most frequently cited by consumers as a source of dissatisfaction with airline performance. We do not expect this to be addressed in this rulemaking, but it must be dealt with eventually.

Respectfully submitted,

Paul M. Ruden

Attorney for the American
Society of Travel Agents, Inc.

February 26, 2002